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# **P** ■ THE SOULS IN ■ **URGATORY**

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# The Catholic Mind

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## PART I.

# MODERN PROTESTANT VIEWS

### 1. PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

The story is told of a little Protestant girl who was asked to define Purgatory. "It is the place," she innocently said, "to which Roman Catholics go when they die." Yet there are many good Protestants who now believe that they themselves are likely to enter there, and piously hope that nothing worse may finally befall them. Indeed there has been a remarkable approach on the part of the Protestant world towards the Catholic doctrine on this subject. The greatest impulse in that direction, in the history of Protestantism, was given by the World War. Not without cause the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Michigan, the Rt. Rev. Charles D. Williams, wrote at that time:

Thousands of young lives, in the very dawn of their promise, are passing daily, suddenly, unprepared, to the unseen. The world that looks on at that spectacle must renew its faith in immortality or go mad. People are following their dead into the unknown with their hearts. *Even in extreme Protestant churches and families prayers for the dead are being offered.*

Yet such prayers are a complete rejection of the original position taken by the Reformers. According to their doctrine, the dead either had "faith" at the last moment, and so were saved; or they had none, and so were lost. Neither good nor bad works were to be taken into account in that view of God's judgment.

Such prayers, too, are a practical rejection of the new position which more recent Protestant theologians assume. Admitting an "intermediate state," they feel compelled by their principles to deny the idea of any expiation to be made there, and hence describe it as "a realm of progressive development," where the soul is supposed

to perfect itself after death, and lay aside its imperfections. But prayers for the dead, in the minds of those who offer them, naturally imply at least a confused notion of a true purgatorial state, of an expiation still to be rendered to the justice of God by souls who are not counted among the eternally lost, and of a belief in His infinite mercy which permits these prayers of the living to be applied to the welfare of their dear departed.

Many admit, in word as well as in practice, the full Catholic doctrine of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. They acknowledge that for the souls of the just there may yet be need of a temporary purification until all the punishment due to sin has been completely paid. Neither do they hesitate bravely to affirm their clear conviction, like the "Poet-Preacher" of Scotland, when in the hour of his own great mourning he exclaimed:

Shall God be wroth because we love them still,  
And call upon His love to shield from ill  
Our dearest, best;  
And bring them home, and recompense their pain,  
*And cleanse their sin, if any sin remain,*  
And give them rest?

As regards the forgiveness of these venial sins of the just, such as the Protestant poet evidently had in mind here, it is the opinion of St. Thomas and of Suarez that their *guilt* is forgiven at once after death. The soul, they argue, then so clearly knows God to be its supreme and only good, that it completely turns away from all sin—an act which suffices to efface all the *guilt* of sin. But the *penalty* to be paid still remains. Since, however, the soul can no longer merit now, it is not able to lessen its purgatorial punishment and hasten its release by any efforts of its own. Hence the need of our prayers and offerings that God may accept them for its relief, a need which the Church has always recognized, and which the Protestant world so widely acknowledged when shell and bayonet drove home so many a vital truth, in spite of all the ruin wrought by them and the havoc done to body and soul.

Thus men realized that the Catholic doctrine concerning Purgatory was after all not "a fond thing, vainly invented," as the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church had declared it to be. So staunch a Protestant divine as the Rev. J. D. Jones, in his book, "The Great Hereafter," readily admitted that "there was a real truth in this doctrine which had been held by the Church for centuries." That this truth was, furthermore, never mingled with error in the Church's teaching we shall readily be able to show.

## 2. PRESENT-DAY SPIRITISM

We referred to the new impulse given to prayers for the dead by the Word War. Yet its effects, we must state at once, were clearly twofold, so far as belief in a future life was concerned.

Some in the great distraction of their grief so far, indeed, lost control of discretion and their right reason as blindly to cast themselves into the arms of a delusive Spiritism. Spurning the Divine admonitions, and wilfully exposing themselves to deception, they returned to the superstitious practices of pagan nations and the supposed intercourse with the dead. This in the past had simply been known as necromancy, and had already been severely condemned in the Old Testament: "Neither let there be found among you any," Almighty God had commanded His chosen people, "that seeketh the truth from the dead."

They were repeating the sin of Saul in consulting the witch of Endor, and what wonder if many have been stricken like him with the punishment of God. Sane reflection should at once have made clear to them that God would not permit the souls of the departed to be brought back from the realms of His eternal justice in answer to such unhallowed summoning. If, therefore, beyond all the notorious trickery, the fraud and self-deception of modern seances, any spirits really respond through the intervention of a venal medium, it is clear that we may regard them as spirits of evil assuming the forms of departed friends, or replying in their stead

to the blinded questioner. There has never been an instance where the identity of the spirit that spoke could be proved. Knowledge that had been possessed by the deceased could readily have also been attained by the spirits that seek the destruction of souls.

When the soul of Samuel really appeared to Saul, as many of the holy Fathers hold, it was not in answer to the summons of the witch, or medium, as now we should call her, but as sent by the offended majesty of God for the punishment of the rash inquirer and to predict the evils that should come upon him. "And forthwith Saul fell all along on the ground, for he was frightened with the words of Samuel." Seances where supposed converse is sought with the dead, are rightly, therefore, forbidden, under censure, by the Church.

### 3. CATHOLIC DOCTRINE REASONABLE

Others there were to whom the war opened up a surer, clearer vision. They again perceived in all its beauty the sweet reasonableness of the Catholic teaching regarding the Faithful departed, which the Church had held from the beginning. In common with their Catholic brethren they now realized the need of a term of purgation, of spiritual purification wrought by the justice of God in the souls not deserving to be rejected eternally, and yet not pure enough to be admitted instantly to the vision of the All-Holy. There might still, at least, be temporal punishment remaining for forgiven sins, as the Scripture teaches, and as we shall later sufficiently explain. Hence there was clearly to be a full expiation now and a perfect cleansing of all stains before the soul could enter the celestial Jerusalem of which the Bible tells us: "There shall not enter into it any thing defiled." (Apoc. xx :27.)

Who can fail to see, moreover, how sweetly the profoundest yearnings of our human hearts are answered in this Divine dispensation? What holier consolation for husband or wife, for parent or child, than to know that their prayers can span the gulf between life and death, and reach out with gentlest aid and pity to the beloved dead? They have passed indeed beyond the

sphere of our poor material ministrations, but we can now comfort them more mightily by our intercession at the throne of God.

What wonder then that men have realized anew the truth and consolation contained in that Catholic doctrine, so Divinely satisfying to human mind and heart, because the expression itself of Divine love! What wonder that they should have disregarded the false fears injected into their souls by baseless traditions, coming down to them from days of religious darkness, and have lifted their voices in humble prayer for their beloved dead!

#### 4. NATURE OF INDULGENCES

A fuller light is breaking. "It may be permitted to a sturdy Protestant to say," writes the Rev. J. D. Jones, "that when our fathers in their revolt against the abuses of Purgatory swept away the very idea of a probationary life, they went too far."

The abuses to which he refers are presumably those said to have been connected with the granting of indulgences. This matter has been greatly misunderstood, and such abuses as at times occurred on the part of individuals have been grossly exaggerated and are in no way connected with the doctrine of the Church, which has always remained inviolate. Indulgences never, of course, implied any pardon for sins to be committed, while they left equally untouched the necessity of confession, as of true sorrow for past sins and a sincere purpose of amendment, together with the determination to right, as far as possible, whatever harm was done.

The value and efficacy of indulgences consist in the fact that they are an application of the superabundant merits and satisfactions of Christ and His Saints, officially made by the Church, in virtue of the administrative capacity conferred upon her by her Divine Founder. The entire doctrine harmonizes with that of the Communion of the Saints, which links the living upon earth with the Blessed in Heaven and with the Souls in Purgatory. Thus the abundance of Christ and His Saints can be applied to our own wants and that of the souls in

suffering, since all are members of one mystic body, whose Head is Christ. Yet the application of these merits and satisfactions to remove certain *temporal* punishments from us or from such souls as are now in Purgatory, supposes the performance of some pious action prescribed by the Church, such as the giving of alms or the recitation of prayers. In gaining the special indulgences granted by the Church the Faithful moreover prepare themselves by confession and the greatest sorrow for their sins. Hence indulgences can, of their nature, only aid to promote a profoundly Christian life in those who seek to gain them.

#### 5. INDULGENCES AND THE REFORMATION

Yet it may be well to give at least a glance at the "abuses" said to have existed in the matter of indulgences just before the Reformation. Abuses, we know, may occur in regard to the administration of even the holiest offices and in the most sacred things. Some such abuses doubtlessly did occur at the time mentioned, but they were greatly exaggerated in the heat of the religious controversy, which, unfortunately still blinds the eyes of many. The accusations against Tetzel in particular, as Father Hull says, have been mainly accounted for either by the unscrupulous controversial methods of the first Reformers, who were quite ready to take up scandalous stories that had been freely invented, or else by the unfair interpretation laid upon rhetorical statements such as might be made by over-zealous preachers. Careful historians find no difficulty in this matter.

The meaning of indulgences was quite as clear in theology *then* as it is *now*. The official program for the preaching of indulgence reflected this theology quite accurately. The Faithful were strictly required to make a contrite confession of all their past sins, and obtain valid absolution for them, and thus to be in a state of forgiveness, before the indulgence could be of any value to them. All this is clearly proved from contemporary documents, and may be considered a settled fact in history. If ignorant people, in spite of the prescribed instructions, did draw from indulgences any bad effect, this could only take the

form of diminishing in their minds the fear of Purgatory, seeing that its punishments could be avoided by the use of indulgences. It never could take the form of believing that indulgences gave a license to sin—an idea which is altogether foreign to the whole Catholic teaching on the subject.

If diminishing the fear of Purgatory is the only possible harm that even the most ignorant can possibly draw from indulgences, as in fact is the case, then Protestantism has sinned most signally in completely abolishing the fear of Purgatory in whose existence all the ages of Christianity had believed, as the Church believes in it today and Protestants themselves have fast begun to believe anew. The question of alms-giving, perplexingly connected in the Protestant mind with the indulgences granted at the time of the Reformation, is thus luminously explained by the same writer:

Protestants must recognize that alms-giving, not only to the poor but also to pious objects, is a virtuous act pleasing to God. Now the building of St. Peter's was in those days considered to be a very pious act for the glory of religion; and it was for this purpose that the Popes bethought themselves of a universal collection from the Faithful. Knowing that the self-sacrifice and charity and piety of contributing to such a devout work was pleasing to God, and productive of favors and rewards from God, they embodied the idea of spiritual reward in the form of a remission of the purgatorial punishment "to all who having confessed their sins contritely and received absolution followed by Holy Communion," would make a certain contribution.

This remission of purgatorial punishment did not, of course, extend to any punishment that would be due to future sins, as some Protestants still seem to imagine, and least of all was it a "condonation of sin" obtainable by money. Such condonation was obtainable only, then as now, "by confession with contrition and purpose of amendment, followed by absolution from the sins thus confessed and repented of."

#### 6. PROTESTANT THEOLOGIAN

Perhaps the use of the word "probationary," by the Rev. Mr. Jones, in connection with the mention of Purga-

tory has been noticed by the reader in the quotation made at the very beginning of our short treatment of the question of indulgences. This use is characteristically Protestant, yet very inaccurate, since our time of trial is strictly limited to the present life. It is doubtless meant to avoid the doctrine of a real expiation that is still exacted by Divine Justice, a doctrine such as, we shall see, the Church has insisted upon from the beginning. For with the moment of death has come "the night in which no man can labor." Yet we realize how completely the old Protestant position has been relinquished when even this recognized Protestant writer could say without any fear of challenge: "And now that the fierceness of controversy has died down, Protestant theologians are returning to a belief in a probationary life after this one."

Indeed it is now common among modern Protestant theologians to admit the existence of what has already been referred to here as an "intermediate state"; but in defining its nature they differ widely from one another. Each theologian may in fact be said to offer his own distinct view of it. "Watson's 'Theology' among the Methodists, describes one kind of 'middle world'; Hodge's 'System of Theology,' among the Presbyterians, has another." Says a writer in the *Missionary*. "Pendleton, who teaches Southern Baptists, gives still another; while Robinson and Strong, who inculcate doctrine to Northern Baptists, express a still different view. The Seventh Day Adventists believe that the dead repose in a sound slumber until the day of judgment; then we have the Unitarian, the Mormon, the Christian Science view, and many others." Such confusion is characteristic of Protestant Christianity, and shows that it cannot hold the key to the problems of life. Truth is one, and one only.

#### 7. RETURN TO CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Yet the impulse by which Protestants pray for their dead is based upon none of these doctrines; but it is logically derived from a concept approaching far more closely to the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and often is almost perfectly identified with it. Among non-

Catholic authors few, if any, have better stated the transition toward the Catholic point of view now taking place in the Protestant heart, and more slowly in the Protestant mind, than W. Mallock. In the eleventh chapter of his book, "Is Life Worth Living?" the following striking passage occurs:

As to this doctrine of Purgatory—which has so long been a stumbling block to the whole Protestant world—time goes on, and the view men take of it is changing. It is becoming fast recognized on all sides that it is the only doctrine that can bring a belief in future rewards and punishments into anything like accordance with our notions of what is just and reasonable. So far from its being a superfluous superstition, it is seen to be just what is demanded at once by reason and morality, and a belief in it to be not only an intellectual assent, but a partial harmonizing of the whole moral ideal.

Thus in legislating against the doctrine of Purgatory, and therefore against prayers for the dead, as "a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture," the Reformers were not merely far from the truth; and equally far from what Mallock rightly says is just and reasonable, and demanded for "a partial harmonizing of the whole moral ideal;" but they made themselves responsible for what another non-Catholic writer describes as one of the greatest cruelties inflicted on mankind. Indeed it is important to seek to understand in its fulness all that is implied in this accusation. The reason on which it is based was thus eloquently stated by an editorial writer in the Protestant Episcopal organ, the *Living Church*:

When Protestantism shut down on praying for the dead, it was guilty of a cruelty to bereaved mourners that is simply monstrous. And we see the result of centuries of that teaching in the blank despair that so often characterizes the Protestant funeral. To lay the widow on the funeral pyre of that husband who has been all the world to her for a long term of years, is hardly more cruel than to tell her that now, when he is torn from her immediate, visible presence, she must cease those prayers that day by day she has offered for him during all those years; that she may some day join him in an unknown life

above, but that in the meantime she can have no relationship with him, must not even pray for him. What wonder that spiritualism made good inroads among people who were taught that doctrine of despair?

We shall be pardoned for quoting here, in contrast with this picture, those well-known lines of Tennyson which repetition can never stale. They are written out of the very heart of Catholicism in its loving consideration for both the living and the dead:

I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within Himself make pure; but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams-of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round world is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

## PART II.

# THE PROOFS FOR PURGATORY

### 1. THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Catholic doctrine of Purgatory has already been stated in the preceding chapter. It contains two truths so obvious that one wonders they should ever have been called into question. The first is that souls departing this life without any grievous sins, such as would exclude them forever from the Vision of God, may yet have lesser stains upon them, or may still have to undergo punishment due to sins already forgiven them on earth. The second truth is equally plain, that since these stains were not cleansed away in this earthly life, they must be purged away in the next. The mere intervention of death cannot undo the fact of the existence of these unatoned transgressions, nor can it dispense with the exercise of the Divine justice which demands full punishment for them. If not rendered in this life, it must certainly be paid in the next.

That sins may be pardoned by Almighty God, and nevertheless a temporal punishment remain to be paid for them is plain from many passages of Holy Scripture. Even when Adam's personal sin had been forgiven the temporal punishment still remained to be paid. He was to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow until he should finally return into the dust from which he came. The passing want of implicit trust in the word of God was forgiven Moses, but he was still to suffer the ultimate penalty, which consisted in his exclusion from the land of promise. Perhaps the most striking instance is that of David pleading for the life of his child, whose death was Divinely decreed, and the decree Divinely executed by the sole Sovereign over life and death. Yet the sin of the King had been forgiven him, which had made men blaspheme the name of God. In all these cases the tem-

poral punishment remained after the soul had been cleansed of its guilt.

It is clear, therefore, that the whole punishment is not always remitted with the guilt of sin. If death intervenes before this punishment is paid on earth, there must be a place or state where it can be paid hereafter in the case of those souls that die with no grievous, or "mortal" guilt upon them. That place or state the Church calls Purgatory.

So again there may be lesser sins, which the Church calls "venial." These, as we have said, may remain both unrepented and unforgiven. Yet how can the soul with the defilement of such stains upon it, and the punishment for them still due, be admitted into the sight of Him whose eyes, the prophet says, "are too pure to behold evil"? (Hab., i: 13.) So here, too, we must acknowledge the need of a place or state in which these transgressions can be fully expiated. This, again, is Purgatory.

## 2. TO THE LAST FARTHING

Purgatory, therefore, as Mallock rightly concluded is a truth we must absolutely accept if we would bring our belief in future rewards and punishments "into anything like accordance with our notions of what is just and reasonable." The soul with venial sins upon it, or satisfaction still due for perhaps forgiven mortal sins, has incurred a debt which must be paid even to the last farthing in another world. Death, in fact, may overtake it in the very moment when it is steeped in such indebtedness. The full payment of this is surely no slight matter if we remember that the account stand against Infinite Justice. God's mercy, it is true, may still intervene in so far as our prayers, alms-deeds, penances and Masses may be accepted for such a soul in lieu of partial or entire payment of these debts, or we may be able to draw by indulgences upon the spiritual treasures of the Church, i. e., the superabundant merits and satisfactions of Christ and of His Saints administered by her. To quote once more a non-Catholic authority. In the *Christian Commonwealth*, September, 1916, Stanley Rus-

sell thus stated his reason for believing in the existence of Purgatory:

Jesus referred to a prison from which there should be no exit until the "uttermost farthing" had been paid, but that very sentence postulates a release when the uttermost farthing has been paid.

"But," says someone again, "this is the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory." Oh, those labels! What care I whether it be Roman Catholic, Methodist or Unitarian, if only it helps me to live and gives me strength to die, and finds corroboration in my touch upon God, and my experience of life? What does it matter whence it comes? I got it from the stage of His Majesty's Theatre, and turned to my New Testament and my heart, and both assured me that it was true. No other consideration interests me.

This argument appealed no less strongly to the early Christians than to this scion of our own modern age. The fact is that even the most highly civilized pagan nations, Greeks, Romans and Indian savants clearly distinguished between temporal and eternal punishments. So the infinite justice and holiness of God are brought into accord with His infinite wisdom and love.

### 3. PROOFS FROM OLD TESTAMENT

For further proof of the doctrine of Purgatory it will be well indeed to turn to the Sacred Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament. From the former various passages are quoted by the Fathers, *e. g.*, by Origen and Ambrose; as indicating the belief in Purgatory. But we naturally turn to the classic passage from the Second Book of Machabees. The inspiration of the Books of Machabees, defined by the Church, and always maintained from the beginning, need not be proved here. Prescinding from this entirely, the purely historic value of these books suffices to show that the practice of the Jews, both priests and people, was one with that of the Church today in praying for the dead. Describing the deeds of the valiant Judas Machabeus the sacred writer adds:

And making a gathering he sent twelve thousand drachmas of

silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection.

(For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead,)

And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid up for them.

*It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.* (II Mach. xxii:43-46.)

From other sources, too, it can be shown that such was the belief of the Jews concerning the dead (*e. g.*, Buxdorf, "Synagoga Judaica," c. 48). It is plain, therefore, that it was the faith of Judas Machabeus and of the Jews at large, approved by the sacred writer, that there could be punishment for sin in the next life from which relief and even release could be afforded by sacrifice and prayer. Such is the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. The canonicity of the Books of Machabees, always accepted in the Church, was denied by Protestantism merely to escape this text. Yet the historic facts remain untouched by this denial.

#### 4. PROOF FROM NEW TESTAMENT

Various passages can be cited from the New Testament which should convince even the most skeptical: "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him," said Our Divine Lord, "but he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, *neither in this world nor in the world to come.*" Hence it follows that there must be sins which are forgiven in the next world. But they are not forgiven in Heaven, where nothing defiled can enter, as the Sacred Scripture tells us. Neither are they forgiven in Hell since Our Lord assures us that from this there is no redemption. Hence there must be a third state, which we call Purgatory. Here alone they can still be cleansed away. Such, moreover, was the interpretation given to this text by that great light of the Church, St. Augustine, by St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, St. Bede and others whose names need not be enumerated here. Equally

familiar is the passage from St. Paul:

For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus.

Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble:

Every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire. (I Cor. iii:11-15.)

The Apostle here insists that a solid edifice should be built by the preachers of the Gospel upon a good foundation, that is upon the doctrine of Christ. Vain and useless doctrines—wood, hay and stubble—are not to be mixed with this. In the test of fire the true foundation will remain, but whatever has through venial faults been mingled with it—such vanities as are described above and which are not mortal sins—will be burned away. The purification will be “so as by fire,” and it will take place in connection with “the day of the Lord,” the day of judgment. In various parts of this epistle, St. Paul refers to this day, and in fact does so immediately before and after the passage quoted above (vv. 8 and 17.). Hence the explanation that there is reference here to the present world cannot hold. The conclusion that suffices for us is that St. Paul clearly teaches that a soul may be saved, and yet suffer punishment after death. This is the plain Catholic doctrine of Purgatory.

The “fire” in the present instance, by which the purification is to take place, is by many taken only figuratively, since the entire passage is metaphorical. The point is that the soul which has been guilty of human vanities in setting forth the Gospel of Christ, will *suffer loss*, will endure punishment in the fire, and yet be finally saved, because it was not guilty of mortal transgressions. Its punishment must be referred to the particular judgment, since the Last Judgment will but confirm before all the world that first, particular judgment

which is passed in the instant of death. On this first individual judgment the earliest Christian traditions are perfectly clear.

#### 5. EARLIEST CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

If, however, this passage is difficult for the reader it suffices to know that great minds like St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Jerome and St. Gregory saw in it a convincing proof of the existence of Purgatory, of a state where the dross of lesser sins—the hay and stubble of life—is burned away, and the soul is at last purified to enter into the presence of God.

That the doctrine of Purgatory was taught and understood in the Church from the earliest days is of course perfectly clear from the many references to it that have come down to us from the earliest centuries. Thus going back to the very cradle of our Faith, we find Tertullian, in his treatise *De Monogamia*, exhorting a widow “to pray for the soul of her husband,” and “to make oblations for him on the anniversary of his demise,” precisely as Catholics do today. St. Cyprian (*Epis. 52 ad Antonin.*) and St. Jerome (*In c. v. Math.*) both quote in proof of the existence of Purgatory the same passage from St. Matthew (v:26) which we have seen was so convincing to Stanley Russel: “This is that which He saith,” writes St. Jerome, “Thou shalt not go out of prison till thou shalt pay even thy little sins.”

St. Augustine, writing his “City of God,” was impressed strongly, as all must be, by that other passage from St. Matthew (xxii:32) referring to those who shall be forgiven neither in this world, nor in the world to come: “Neither could it be truly said of some,” he argues, “that they are neither forgiven in this life, nor in the life to come, unless there were some, who though they are not forgiven in this life, yet should be in the life to come.”

St. Cyprian makes allusion to the sacrifice of the Mass offered for the souls of the dead, precisely as any Bishop or priest might do today and calls attention to a refusal of the holy Mass to the souls of those who violate the law forbidding them to appoint a churchman as their executor. The preciousness of this holy Sacrifice, as

offered for the dead, is equally insisted upon by St. Chrysostom, who invokes Apostolic authority for this practice:

Not without reason was it *ordained by the Apostles*, that in celebrating the Sacred Mysteries the dead should be remembered; for they well knew what advantage would thence be derived. (*Hom. 3 in Ep. ad Philip.*)

We might continue to quote almost indefinitely from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and from the earliest Christian writers, to show how perfectly the first centuries of Catholicity were linked with our own present times in one clear understanding and one practical application of the doctrine of Purgatory. In the fourth century we hear a Council of the Church speaking of suffrages for the dead as we might speak today, and as Tertullian had spoken even centuries before. (*Carth. II, can. 29.*)

#### 6. "HOLY COMMON SENSE."

Further, all the ancient liturgies, even some in use among the early oriental sectaries, such as the Nestorians, contain prayers for the dead. The very oldest, that go back unquestionably to the Apostles themselves, contain without any exception prayers and remembrances for the departed. In the liturgy of St. James we read: "May this oblation which the living offer for the dead, expiate the soul's iniquity, and may its transgressions be remitted." (*"Kirchenlexicon,"* article "*Fegfeuer.*")

There is consequently no confusion or doubt in this teaching. The passages quoted to prove an apparent contradiction deal merely with the uncertainties regarding the precise nature of the punishments of Purgatory, their place and duration. On these subjects no authoritative doctrine has been handed down to us that is of faith. But of one thing there can be no doubt, and that is that the first Christians distinguished as clearly as we between Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. As a final example it will suffice to quote here from one of the very earliest writers of the Church. In reference to the Pauline text which we have already discussed at considerable length, Origen says:

For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones, but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into Heaven with your wood and hay and stubble and thus defile the Kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood and hay and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions, and then returns to us the reward of our good works. (*P. G.*, XIII, col. 445, 488, quoted in "The Catholic Encyclopedia.")

There could be no clearer statement of the doctrine of Purgatory and the reason for it than is given in these lines, written at the very beginning of the Christian Church. Here is the echo of them in our own day from the lips of a speaker who though himself without the Fold, could not but recognize the impregnable strength of the Catholic position, the Rev H. Page Dyer, whose words merely repeat the argument of Origen:

The ancient belief of God's Church is one of holy common sense. Few souls are so pure that they are fit for Heaven, where nothing that is defiled may enter. And yet there are many millions of people who are too good to go to Hell. This vast body of immortal beings will at death go neither to Heaven nor to Hell, but to an intermediate state, a sort of vestibule to heaven, an ante-chamber, where their stains will be removed, and where a Divine process of purgation is mercifully provided by Almighty God.

These then are the reasons why Catholics believe in the Doctrine of Purgatory, which all must accept who would not deny the Church and the Scriptures; who would not gainsay the long traditions of the ancient Synagogue and of all the Christian centuries; who would not, in fine, reject the clear demands of morality, of "holy common sense," and of Divine Justice.

## PART III.

# WHY AID THE POOR SOULS?

### 1. DURATION OF PURGATORY

In the earliest monuments of the Church, the catacombs, we clearly find recorded the belief in a particular judgment. This, as we hold in common with all the ages of the Faith, precedes the last general judgment, in which God's dealings with the individual souls are justified before all the world. Constant reference is made in the inscriptions of the catacombs to intercession for the dead, and the passer-by is asked to pray for them. Such prayers can be founded only on the belief in a particular judgment, according to which the souls of the just are even now undergoing their purgation of whatever stains must still be cleansed away. But with the last judgment, Purgatory itself will cease to be. There is thenceforth to be only Heaven and Hell, since all temporal punishments will then have been paid. On this, too, the Scripture is clear. The same thought is plainly expressed by St. Augustine in the twenty-first chapter of his "City of God":

But temporary punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by others after death, by others both now and then; but all of these temporal punishments are to be exacted before the last and strictest judgment.

While Purgatory itself is limited by the last judgment, we cannot speak with equal certainty of the length of time during which individual souls may have to undergo their purification, that they be rendered fit to enter into the sight of the All-Holy God. The duration of Purgatory may extend for some over many years. Of this we are practically certain, since it is the custom of the Church herself to offer up anniversary Masses for individual souls during hundreds of years. Yet, foreseeing these, God might free the soul at once. Let us then help

on our part that the day of their release may be hastened by us: "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosened from their sins.

## 2. THE PAIN OF LOSS

But properly to understand the reason for coming to the aid of the dear departed who have died in the grace of God, we must understand also the nature of their sufferings. These will better make clear to us, moreover, how great a work of charity it is to exert ourselves for their release, and how dear such efforts are to Almighty God, who loves these souls with an inexpressible love and desires most earnestly that their time of agony may be shortened and they may fly to His embrace. So we shall best be moved to emulate the zeal of the early Christians in praying for their dead and offering up for them the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The punishment of Purgatory is twofold: the pain of sense and the pain of loss. The latter, to be first considered here, consists in the fact that the soul is held back, through its own fault, from the Vision of God. The more eagerly an object is desired, St. Thomas argues, the more keenly is its absence felt. Now the eagerness with which the holy souls desire to be forthwith united to God, the highest possible good, is most intense, because it is not retarded by the weight of the mortal body, and also because the time for the Vision of God would now be at hand, were the souls not delayed by the hindrance it has placed in its sins. We cannot possibly measure the distress which this delay now inflicts upon it. In life a soul may have minded little the fact that by a venial sin it was offending the infinite Love of God. But now that death has come the soul can comprehend the greatness of its folly. All earthly things, which once distracted it and withdrew it from the service and love of God above all things, have disappeared. It has God alone to rest in. It longs for God with an inexpressible desire, and yet is constantly held back by its own previous wilfulness. Its prison door is locked, and it waits with unutterable yearning for the moment

when it may look upon His Face in ecstasy, when its stains shall have been cleansed away and it will leap to the embrace of Him who from all eternity has loved it with a love beyond compare.

### 3. THE IMPRISONED BRIDE

To make plain, however faintly, the desire to possess God, which now consumes the soul, we can find perhaps no better comparison than that of the bride who longs with passionate eagerness for her spouse, the best beloved. It is, after all, the comparison that Almighty God Himself makes in speaking of His relation to the souls of men.

So let us consider this bride in our similitude. It is the morning of her proposed marriage. The time has come when she is to go forth into the arms of her beloved. Instead she finds herself detained. She is cast into a distant prison. Her own folly has suddenly brought upon her the just sanction of the law, and she is left in loneliness to eat away her heart with unavailing grief. One consolation still remains to her, and that is that her beloved will remain constant to her. Yet what pain this separation causes her, which grows more terrible as it drags on slowly, month by month—perhaps, it may be, for years!

But this is not all the story. Glancing into her mirror she discovers with inexpressible horror the effects of a disease, not moral indeed, but dreadfully disfiguring all her comeliness. It had before appeared so insignificant that she gave it no thought. The venom was even then within her system; it has now merely broken out and become visible in its effects. Can anyone imagine her distress. To the longing for her beloved is added the pain which the knowledge of this loathsomeness must cause her, that now clouds all her beauty.

Who can fail to see the parallel between this earthly bride and the soul confined in the prison of God's holiness and justice, stained with the effects of her transgressions, yet yearning inexpressibly for the Vision of His glory. Freed from all earthliness she tends towards

Him as the arrow to its mark, and yet for all her longing is unable to attain to Him. Keenly she feels those dreadful disfigurements which once passed unnoticed here below. But for her, too, one consolation remains, and that is that the severance is not eternal which now holds her afar from her supreme and only Good.

How easily she could have won God's pardon here on earth by contrition, confession and a sincere purpose of amendment! As St. Basil says: "When through confession we make known our sins, we have caused the rankly growing weeds to wither which deserve to be harvested for Purgatory and consumed there." But now she can do nothing for herself. Who then can measure the gratitude of that soul towards those who remember her in the time of her great distress and both help to cleanse away her stains and to hasten the hour of her blissful union with her Beloved! How earnestly she will remember them at the Throne of His Mercy!

#### 4. THE PAIN OF SENSE

Incomprehensible as the greatness of the punishment of loss must be to us here upon earth, the pain of sense, though less in itself, may often impress the imagination far more profoundly. What the nature of this punishment is has never been dogmatically affirmed by the Church. It is not a matter of Faith; but the main weight of tradition, and the universal belief of the Faithful can be said to be summed up in the belief that the souls in Purgatory are punished by fire. St. Thomas thus expresses in brief his doctrine upon the subject of purgatorial punishments:

In Purgatory the suffering is two-fold: that of loss, inasmuch as the soul is kept back from the Vision of God; and that of sense, *since they shall be punished with fire*. Now in both respects, the least pain in Purgatory exceeds the greatest pain in this life.

Whether this contrast of the least pain of Purgatory with the greatest pain of this life holds absolutely true or not, we have no reason to doubt the conclusion of various authorities that these sufferings, in general, are

far more severe than any endured upon earth. Referring particularly to the pain of fire St. Augustine says, in commenting on Psalm xxxvii, that it "is more severe than any that man can suffer in this life." The very same statement is made by St. Gregory the Great.

#### 5. THE FIRE OF PURGATORY

That there is question here of real fire seems evidently to have been the belief of the very earliest Christians. Going back to the inscriptions contained in the catacombs we find constant allusion made to procuring refreshment for the souls of the departed. This would seem to imply the giving of relief or release from the heat of those fiercely burning flames. Thus St. Ambrose, in the early centuries of the Church, interpreted the Pauline text, I Cor. iii:15, which we have already quoted; and Theodoret wrote upon the same passage: "We believe that is that cleansing fire in which the souls are purified as gold in the furnace." The same interpretation is given to this text by St. Jerome and various Fathers, while others interpret it figuratively.

Both Greek and Latin Fathers speak of the flames of Purgatory. St Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa already definitely refer to it as "purgatorial fire." Owing to the opposition of Greek theologians the question whether the souls in Purgatory are punished by fire was left undecided at the Council of Florence. Yet several Greek Fathers had been clear in their affirmation that the souls of the just are cleansed by fire. In modern times Suarez was able to state that such is the common teaching of all theologians and that they agree in admitting a true and real fire. St Thomas and St. Bonaventure alike held that: "It is one and the same fire which torments the lost in Hell and cleanses the just in Purgatory."

Catholics in general are accustomed to speak without any hesitation of the fire of Purgatory, and in doing so are in conformity with many of the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and with the classic opinion of theologians. That the pains inflicted are certainly more terrible than any suffered upon earth we can have no

difficulty in believing, if we have any understanding of the meaning of sin, on the one hand, and the nature of the attributes of an infinite God on the other, a God who is no less infinitely just, infinitely pure, and infinitely holy; that He is infinitely merciful, and infinitely loving. It is to these last attributes that we ascribe the blessed opportunity granted us of extending a helping hand to the sufferers in those purgatorial flames, and of even releasing them entirely in return for our offerings and supplications accepted in their regard.

#### 6. COMMUNION OF SAINTS

How happy then to know that we are part of a mighty fellowship, of a glorious company, united by ties of affection that reach beyond the grave into eternity! Through the Communion of Saints we are joined by links of intimate relationship in Christ with the Blessed in Heaven and with the souls of all the Faithful departed in Purgatory.

Deep and true is the affection that the Saints in glory have for us, and great is their willingness to come to our aid; but we in our turn must be equally alert to succor and relieve those who may depend upon us, whether in this life or in the next. What thought, especially, can be more consoling than to know that we can still bring comfort, and perhaps quick release from pain, to those whom on earth we once loved so dearly; that we can hasten to their help and reach out to their parched lips, at any moment, the blessed cup of cooling water.

But not only are we to remember our own dear departed. Our love should seek to come to the assistance of all detained in that prison house of God, that place of expiation and purification where so many of His dearest friends are imploring our pity in accents of deepest yearning and distress.

Never, to our own knowledge, was the pleading of the souls in those cleaving fires expressed in a strain more appealing and in words more tuneful and compelling, outside of the Holy Books, than in that "Appeal of the

Suffering Souls" which was found among the papers of an Irish Jesuit Father, the Rev. James Murphy. Here are his verses in full as they appeared in the *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. Yet in their simplicity they are nothing more than a varied application of that verse of Job: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me." Ceaselessly they re-echo all the plain-tiveness of those mighty syllables of sorrow, like a sea-shell still reverberating with the rhythm of the long-resounding ocean surf.

## IN THE MORNING

When the pure air comes unbreathed and the fresh fields lie untrod,

When the lark's song rises upward and the wet flowers deck the sod;

In the time of early praying, in the hushed and holy morn.

Hear those voices softly pleading, hear those low words interceding,

From the green graves lonesome lying,

Ever more in sad tones crying:

"Have pity! you at least have pity, you, my friends."

## IN THE NOONTIDE

When the hot earth also slumbers and the treetop scarcely stirs,

When the bee sleeps in the lily and the hare pants by the furze,

When the stream breeze softly cools you and the grateful shade invites,

While the hot skies far are glowing, think of pain, no respite knowing,

And those prison fires appalling,

And those piteous voices calling:

"Have pity! you at least have pity, you, my friends."

## IN THE EVENING

When the long day's cares are ended and the house group soon shall meet,

When the silent twilight deepens and comes rest for weary feet,

In the time of sad remembrance give a prayer to old friends gone.

Some regret, some feelings tender, to past days and scenes surrender,

Let your heart with mournful greeting

**Hear the sad refrain repeating:**

“Have pity! you at least have pity, you, my friends.”

#### IN THE NIGHTTIME

When the stars are set in ether and the white moon in a cloud,  
When the children's hands are folded and the golden heads are bowed,

Tell them of that fearful burning, of those souls in torture dire,  
Expiating pride and folly in the purifying fire.

Let their sinless hearts adoring reach Christ's throne in sweet imploring:

By those faces lost forever,

By those smiles to greet thee never,

By the memories of past days,

And the kindness of old ways,

By the love in life you bore them,

And the tears in death shed o'er them,

By their words and looks in dying,

Hear their plaintive voices crying:

“Have pity! you at least have pity, you, my friends.”

## PART IV.

# HOW TO HELP THE POOR SOULS

### 1. PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN AGES

Supplication, as we have seen, was made for the souls of the dead by priests and people in the Old Testament. From the very beginning of Christianity we find this practice to have been characteristic of the charity of the first believers. Through all the ages of the Church the Faithful have piously remembered the dead in their offerings and intercessions, and the priests have recommended them to God in their Holy Sacrifices. The custom described by St. Ephrem in the first centuries of Christianity is equally observed today.

“My brethren, come to me, and prepare me for my departure,” he wrote in setting down his testament, and then continued to describe what he wished they should do for him after his death: “Go along with me in psalms and in your prayers, and fail not constantly to make oblations for me.” Particularly he calls attention to the month’s mind, offered then as now: “When the thirtieth day shall be completed, then remember me.” So, too, even before this time, Tertullian calls attention to the anniversary Sacrifice for the dead. And what could be more explicit than the explanation offered in those early ages by St. Cyril of Jerusalem describing the liturgy in the fourth century, precisely as we find it observed in the twentieth century within the same Catholic Church?

We commemorate all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great advantage to the souls for whom the supplication is put up, while that holy and most awful Sacrifice is presented. (Oxford. Transl. p. 275. *Catech. myst.* 5, 9.)

Thus we see how all the centuries of Christianity are united in one and the same faith, and one and the same

practice; for turning to the Council of Trent we find the teaching of the Scriptures and the Fathers repeated no less clearly in affirming the existence of Purgatory, and adding that: "The souls therein detained are aided by the suffrages of the Faithful and principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar."

What Catholic mother of today would not die joyfully repeating to her own priest son the words of Monica to her Augustine? "Lay this body anywhere; be not concerned about that. One favor only do I beg of you: that wherever you may be, you will always make a remembrance of me, when you stand at the Altar of God."

## 2. THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

It is clear, therefore, that the first and most powerful means by which we can come to the aid of the dear departed is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Such is the tradition of the Church through all the centuries. Nothing could be more plain from the many quotations already scattered over these pages. The oldest Roman *Sacramentarium*, that of Leo, dating back to about the year 450 contains six different Mass formulas for the dead. Parts of these prayers are in fact in our Missals to the present day. Going back to the catacombs we meet with the image of the soul in blessedness as the fruit of the Holy Sacrifice.

The gilds of the Middle Ages secured the services of as many chaplains as they could that numerous Masses might be said for their dead immediately after their departure from this life, and that they might thereafter also be remembered in the Holy Sacrifice. Such is the tradition of the entire Church from Apostolic days. Love for the dead can show itself in no better way than in the Masses, said or sung, that are offered for them. The Church herself accords special privileges by which High Masses of Requiem can be celebrated every day, except on Sundays and on some great feasts of the year, together with their octaves. The added solemnity implies also an added glory given to Almighty God, and a special benefit for the suffering souls.

Our offerings for the dead will naturally be proportioned to our means. But all are able to show from time to time their charity to the dead, and to remember their own dear departed. Catholics should show by their example that they realize that Masses are of all but infinitely greater importance at the passing of the soul into eternity than precious caskets and mounds of flowers. The beauty of modest flowery wreaths is not indeed out of place to cheer the living and may well be a sweet act of charity to them in their desolation; but the Masses for the dead are the one supreme thing to bear in mind. Let retrenchments be made anywhere except here. Let there be, not one only, but many Masses; and let the souls not be forgotten with the months and years. Yet how often is not the contrary the practice of thoughtless Christians, who while meaning to be kind in their lavish funeral expenses are in reality unspeakably cruel to their dead, cherishing the lifeless form, and leaving the soul to smart in pain.

### 3. GAINING INDULGENCES

In the next place there is that treasury of the superabundant merits and satisfactions of Christ and His Saints, which we can never exhaust, and from which we may draw ceaselessly through the indulgences the Church grants us, and which she generally permits us to apply to the souls in Purgatory. Unspeakably great are the indulgences of the Way of the Cross, the various indulgences of the Rosary and Scapular, and those connected with so many sodalities, confraternities and religious societies. With every Communion a plenary indulgence can be gained for the Poor Souls under the proper conditions. Thus to obtain such an indulgence after Confession and Communion, the Faithful need but delay to recite before an image of the Crucified, such as they will find over every altar, that short and beautiful prayer so familiar to all:

Behold, O kind and sweet Jesus, I cast myself upon my knees in Thy sight, and with the most fervent desires of my soul I

pray and beseech Thee that Thou wouldst impress upon my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, with true repentance for my sins, and a firm desire of amendment, whilst with deep affection and grief of soul I ponder within myself, and mentally contemplate Thy five most precious wounds; having before my eyes that which David in prophecy made Thee say concerning Thyself, O good Jesus: "They have pierced my hands and feet, they have numbered all my bones."

In addition some prayers must here be said for the intention of the Holy Father that this plenary indulgence may be gained. The custom of the Faithful is here to recite five "Our Fathers" and five "Hail Marys," although no special prayers are assigned. To gain more than one plenary indulgence, to which we may for various reasons be entitled, we must for each make a separate visit to the Blessed Sacrament, where such a condition is definitely assigned. Special privileges are accorded by the Church to those who have made the "heroic act" in favor of the souls in Purgatory.

#### 4. POWER OF GOOD WORKS

Other good works, too, may be performed for the Poor Souls. Especially approved throughout all the history of the Church has been the offering of alms for their sake. We are told that as water extinguishes fire, so alms destroy sins. Without any doubt, says St. Augustine, "will the departed souls obtain relief when the Sacrifice of the Mediator (*i. e.* the Holy Mass) is offered for them, or alms are spent in the Church." (*enchi-ridion*, c. 110.) Such alms may of course be given anywhere. "We are too forgetful of our dear departed," St. Francis de Sales often said, and he makes this beautiful comparison between the corporal works of mercy and our assistance granted the souls in Purgatory, without wishing to lessen our zeal for the former:

We like to perform works of mercy, and do not remember that in endeavoring to obtain relief for these poor souls we shall practice almost all the works of mercy at one and the same time. Is this not to console the sorrowing, to assist the sick, to

visit the prisoners, to free them or to lighten the weight of their chains; is this not to practise hospitality, by conducting these children of God into the house of their Heavenly Father. You give clothing to those in need of it, but is it not even better to clothe these suffering members of the mystic body of Jesus Christ with undying glory.

St. Margaret Mary suggests the performance of acts of different virtues, of purity of intention, of humility, of meekness and kindness, to be offered up for these souls. "But as pride is the heaviest debt," she counselled her novices, "you will make as many acts of humility as you can." No one can fail to see how such charity towards the Poor Souls must beget in those who practise it the highest degree of perfection, while the neglect of these sufferers may in turn withdraw a large measure of God's grace and mercy from the soul that refuses charity to the dead. Prayers offered for such a soul may never be applied to her by Almighty God, but may be given to others.

In the *Memoire des Contemporaines* we read of St. Margaret Mary, that while she was praying for two persons who had been of some note in the world, one was shown to her as condemned for long years to the pains of Purgatory. All the prayers and suffrages which were offered to God for his repose, she tells us, were applied by the Divine Justice to the souls of some families, who had been ruined by his defect of charity and equity in their regard. The surviving members had nothing left to have Masses said for their departed, and the Lord thus supplied for them. Large bequests for Masses cannot in themselves bribe Almighty God to overlook the carelessness or want of charity on the part of those who have disregarded the needs of others, whether calling for help in this life or in the next.

##### 5. THE SACRED HEART AND MARY

St. Margaret Mary recommends as a sovereign remedy for the Poor Souls devotion to the Sacred Heart, and particularly Masses in its honor. Thus she once asked a person to have fifteen Masses said in honor of the

Sacred Heart for a certain soul. "After which it seems to me," she added, "he will proceed into glory, and will be for you and his whole family a powerful advocate near the Sacred Heart." Is it not worth while for us to make such friends with God?

The Saint herself had the greatest love for the Poor Souls, and one Holy Thursday, while watching before the Blessed Sacrament, she felt herself surrounded by these poor sufferers. "Our Lord told me," she writes, "that He gave me to them for that whole year, in order to do for them all the good that I could." While she endured the greatest sufferings for these souls she was granted also the reward of an intimate knowledge concerning them. Two of the souls for whom she had interceded were beheld by her taken up into glory. "If you knew," she wrote to her superior regarding them, "how transported my soul has been, for in speaking to them, I saw them, little by little, absorbed and drawn up into glory, like a person merged in a vast ocean."

Though these brief references are made here to the visions of this great Saint of the Sacred Heart, we have purposely refrained from recounting any other of the countless similar narratives of sainted persons, which all agree in the substance of their accounts. The object of this brief treatise has been to deal with the subject of Purgatory on the basis of Scripture and of Patristic tradition, and to present the teaching and practice of the Church.

Considering our subject from a purely spiritual point of view, we know that one of the most ardent desires of the Heart of Christ is without any doubt the liberation of these suffering souls, for they are the souls of the just whom nothing can ever wrest from Him hereafter.

But next to the Heart of Christ there is none who so loves these souls as Mary. Brimmed with pity and tender love for them is that Heart which mothers all the world, and whose intercession is so mighty with her Divine Son. Surely devotion to Mary must be a powerful master key to unlock those prison gates and set free her children mourning there and waiting our help in those searching fires of God's punishment.

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